

Status Report On The Iowa Veterans Identification Project for the October 31st
Meeting Of The Joint Government Oversight Committee

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Mission Statement: “To enhance the quality of life of Iowa’s wartime Veterans and surviving spouses in their senior years.”

Goal: The Iowa Veterans Identification Project (IVIP) seeks to identify Iowa wartime Veterans and surviving dependents who may be eligible for federal Veterans Affairs pension and health benefits and to assist them in the benefits application process.

Statement of need

Iowa’s wartime veterans and surviving spouses in senior living communities are generally unaware of or consider themselves unable to access federal VA pension and health benefits to which they may be entitled. Outreach promoting awareness and creating greater access to this benefits system strengthens families by addressing the problem on an individual basis and also brings additional federal health care dollars into the state.

Financial Impact

The average monthly federal VA pension benefit is \$864 and the average monthly federal VA benefit for health services is \$390, according to the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs. Based on the estimate that IVIP volunteers will help nursing home residents file 120 pension claims and 60 applications for health benefits during FY ’06, the potential financial gain over a 12-month period to the state if 75 percent of the claims are successful amounts to \$1,143,720. Given the General Fund appropriation of \$50,000, the State would see a return of \$22.87 for each dollar appropriated. Since successful claims are paid out over the lifetime of the claimant, the return on investment increases dramatically over time. For example, the State would see a return of \$114 for each dollar appropriated in FY ’06 on IVIP based on an estimated \$5,718,600 in federal VA benefits paid out to Iowa seniors over a five-year period.

Quick background

The Iowa Veterans Identification Project (IVIP) is an outreach program aimed at helping wartime Veterans and surviving spouses in nursing homes and other senior living communities. The Legislature created the project in 2004 in response to the state’s low ranking in the percentage of veterans who receive disability benefits. IVIP is a function of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), which deploys volunteers to help senior living community residents apply for Federal Veterans Affairs pension and health benefits.

The process of laying the groundwork for IVIP at the state agency level was completed in late 2004. IVIP coordinators have trained 17 volunteers who work in Muscatine, Polk, Scott, and Iowa counties, and have developed tracking systems and other tools to help them carry out their work. February 2005 saw the start of an intensive phase of identifying precisely how and where the project would be implemented. This depended largely on establishing working relationships within the sensitive environment of Senior Living Communities. **Fieldwork with potential claimants began in earnest in April 2005.**

Progress

In the past seven months, IVIP has helped over four hundred nursing home residents determine their eligibility for federal VA pension and health benefits. Volunteers are still in the process of helping some of those residents file pension claims and/or apply for health benefits. So far, IVIP volunteers have completed and filed a total of 71 pension claims and applications for health benefits. The Iowa Department of Veterans affairs estimates there about 1,095 senior living community residents in the four counties who may potentially be able to receive these types of VA benefits.

Summary

IVIP is an enhancement of the functions of the state and (relevant) county commissions of Veterans affairs. Our shared success in helping more wartime veterans and surviving spouses maintain their ability to pay privately for senior living care depends on this collaboration. The program affords families a choice as members enter their post retirement years by accessing federal VA pension and health benefits. In this way, the VA pension is an attractive alternative to families that otherwise might have to rely on Medicaid to pay for nursing home care. Significant positive results for the State budget can be expected as the burden on Medicaid is lessened and more residents are able to pay privately for their care for longer periods of time. Bringing this benefit to those who earned it is major a step towards preserving the dignity of people who fought for the freedoms we all enjoy today. It feels great to be helping the Greatest Generation!